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United Nations Volunteers

Report of the Administrator

I. PURPOSE

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 (i) of Governing Council decision 92/2 of 14 February 1992, in which the Council decided to review the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme on a biennial basis. The report outlines the significant programme thrusts made by UNV during the 1992-1993 biennium in response to the challenges faced by the international community and shows how UNV has had an increasing impact on many of the recent initiatives of the United Nations, spanning the spectrum from development to humanitarian and peace-related activities. Action is sought from the Executive Board regarding: (a) the management of the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) programme; and (b) the planning of the use of general purpose funds of the Special Voluntary Fund (SVF).

II. BROAD PROGRAMME DIRECTIONS IN 1992-1993

2. An average of 3,500 UNV assignments have been undertaken each year, with usually over 2,000 ongoing at any given moment (there were 2,085 serving UNV specialists on 31 December 1993). The major focus of UNV activities continues to be in the following four main arenas:

(a) Classic technical cooperation for development (just over half of total assignments), where UNV specialists serve within the framework of United Nations system projects, mostly funded out of the country indicative planning figures (IPFs). Important lessons are being applied on how to enhance continuously the management and increase the sustainability of these activities, as learned from a series of cross-country evaluations undertaken during the biennium covering the health and education sectors;

(b) Support to community-based initiatives (one fifth of total assignments). Basing itself on the efforts of community-based organizations (CBOs) and smaller local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and on the experience of its long-standing Domestic Development Services (DDS) programme, UNV has supported greater use of local expertise and resources and has helped to identify replicable forms of indigenous technical knowledge. SVF has enabled the programme to explore creatively and proactively newer programme areas, such as artisan networks, community-based rehabilitation of the disabled, and communications linkages between local resource management groups;

(c) Peace-related activities of the United Nations (nearly one fifth of total assignments), funded by the special operations themselves or out of trust funds negotiated with UNV. The most important of these have been related to election preparations and democratization efforts, and to the reintegration into civilian life of demobilized soldiers, especially in Cambodia and Mozambique;

(d) Humanitarian relief and rehabilitation (one tenth of total assignments), where the contribution of UNV specialists has been to support the refugee-assistance, food-aid and other emergency programmes of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), generally under the coordination of the Department for Humanitarian Affairs (DHA). Most of the assignments have taken place in the complex emergency situations being handled under the United Nations major peace-keeping operations.

3. Previously sharp dividing lines between these categories have been disappearing, as the international community has itself appreciated the increasingly interlocking nature of relief, peace-building and development activities in the situations faced by people in a growing number of United Nations member countries. A common approach that has guided UNV actions in the four seemingly disparate categories has been to capitalize on the ability of UNV to support effectively the efforts of low-income and vulnerable community groups; to attain self-reliance and to support their response, coping and survival mechanisms. It is this closeness of UNV to the local level of resources, knowledge and experience that acts as the common thread of the UNV programme, and provides it with its chief distinguishing characteristic. This then enables UNV to draw on a solid information base to establish the substantive content of its support to other levels of development administration, capacity-building, or policy formulation (district/municipal, provincial, and central government) through the United Nations system.

III. ISSUES OF POLICY CONCERN

4. Experience during the biennium has demonstrated the widening involvement of UNV across the development-humanitarian-peace spectrum, with a particular focus on the special volunteer roles that give a unique identity to the UNV contribution. The United Nations responsibilities have certainly evolved since the original mandate was first given to UNV by the General Assembly in 1970, perhaps most dramatically over the last biennium. Volunteer roles have already proved themselves to be particularly appropriate to many of the concerns in

peace-building and humanitarian relief, especially if the impact of the latter is to be sustained through local capacity-building and participation.

5. During the biennium, UNV has sought to elaborate, together with its partners, a strategic approach for the period 1993 to 1996. A guidance note on the UNV contribution in the United Nations system was also issued by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) in April 1993. Further recognition of UNV involvement in the United Nations Agenda for Peace was provided by the Joint Inspection Unit and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), and the role of UNV specialists among the civilian personnel component of the United Nations operations has been part of the ongoing discussions by the General Assembly. The challenge to combine the need for focus in the programme with maintaining its relevance to the full range of demands of the continuum is being met through the careful identification of UNV with the special volunteer perspective and style of operation, derived from its solid base at the community level.

6. In order to be able to offer a relevant response to this range of developing country needs, UNV has had to demonstrate both agility and flexibility in stretching to the maximum its organizational capacity and position within UNDP and the United Nations system. Mobilizing volunteer resources from all sources has been a priority, calling for the involvement, in mixed teams, of national and international UNV specialists, DDS field workers and local volunteers. After extensive discussion and consultation with partners, and based on the experience of a few pilot ventures using national volunteers, a guidance note on the use of national volunteers was circulated in mid-1993 to partners world wide. Another priority has been to widen the range of UNV partners, beyond central Governments and United Nations organizations, to involve more local community groups, local governments and municipalities, the development banks, and national and international NGOs. A third has been to make use of a full spectrum of assignment periods, from three months to a cumulative total of six years.

7. In having the United Nations International Short-Term Advisory Resources (UNISTAR) recently come under UNV management, and in working together with TOKTEN modalities, notably in the Commonwealth of Independent States, UNV has helped to encourage complementarity between all forms of volunteer contribution to development in the United Nations system. In UNV general procedures, management has been decentralized to the country and programme levels as far as possible. Selective subcontracting of some functions to partners has proved effective and economic. The establishment of a pilot offshore processing centre in Cyprus has also started testing the cost-effectiveness of undertaking data-intensive transactions at a lower-cost location.

8. An examination of the sources of funding UNV country activities during the biennium shows the sharp fall that has taken place in the share of UNDP resources (primarily indicative planning figures (IPFs)) in the total. In 1992, this dropped to 54.7 per cent from 70.1 per cent in 1991; in 1993 it was even lower at an estimated 49.9 per cent. The difference was made up largely from the United Nations and trust funds (for a total value of $27 million), for the newer areas of UNV operations. While part of this fall is certainly attributable to the curtailment of programmable IPFs in general, it also points

to the need for greater awareness of the relevance of UNV to the more focused country programmes funded by UNDP. The Administrator considers UNV to be an essential instrument in furthering the overall UNDP overall objective of promoting sustainable human development; in doing so, UNV will be able to draw also on many of the non-IPF resources needed to be mobilized for this purpose.

9. The call by the Governing Council on several occasions to place the DDS programme on a secure, continuing basis obtained generous ongoing support from one donor in particular, followed by one other. Regular financing of the DDS programme, however, continues to remain unstable. At a time when the development emphasis is increasingly on strengthening community initiative and participation, the need for assured and firm funding for the DDS programme is even more of an imperative. UNDP will continue to work with UNV in seeking more financial support from additional sources for this purpose.

10. The contributions to the SVF have increased in moderate terms over the past two years (see annex). However, as these contributions to the Fund remain modest, the level of activity it has supported has been further constrained by the inability to commit funds beyond the actual cash in hand. It is pertinent to note that when funds are committed for a project, the expenditure for the project is protracted and reported over a period of one to three years. Therefore, despite ensuring that SVF resources are substantially committed and earmarked for pipeline projects, this procedure gives a misleading impression that SVF funds are lying idle. Although most contributions are received in the year of the pledge, the commitment of funds is currently delayed until the actual receipt of contributions. The approach suggested in paragraph 11, section 3, below, would provide flexibility in programming and enable more efficient utilization of resources available to UNV. This practice would also facilitate higher programme delivery to meet growing needs in the areas specified in Governing Council decision 92/35 and would also provide more accurate information on the utilization of funds for existing and potential donors.

IV. EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION

11. The Executive Board may wish to:

(a) Note the range of roles being undertaken by the United Nations Volunteers, encompassing its participation in the full development-humanitarian relief-peace continuum as described in the report of the Administrator (DP/1994/28);

(b) Invite the Administrator to designate the United Nations Volunteers as manager of the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) initiative in addition to the United Nations International Short-Term Advisory Resources (UNISTAR) programme, which has already merged with UNV;

(c) Authorize the United Nations Volunteers to commit funds, on a fully funded basis, on receipt of written pledges rather than on receipt of the funds.

Annex

RESOURCE PLANNING TABLE: PROJECTED RESOURCE AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF SVF a/

(In millions of United States dollars)

	Actual		Projected		
	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
I. AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES					
Balance as at 1 January	0.49	1.68	3.47	3.77	3.47
Voluntary contributions	1.11	1.76	1.50	1.50	1.50
Interest and other income	0.51	0.50	0.80	0.80	0.80
Total available resources	2.11	3.94	5.77	6.07	5.77
II. UTILIZATION OF RESOURCES					
Experimental pilot projects	0.43	0.47	2.00	2.60	4.00
III. BALANCE OF RESOURCES AS AT 31 DECEMBER (I-II)	1.68	3.47	3.77	3.47	1.77
IV. COMMITMENT FOR FUTURE YEARS AS AT 31 DECEMBER					
Experimental pilot projects	1.34	2.26	3.10	3.30	2.00
V. ESTIMATED SURPLUS (DEFICIT) AS AT 31 DECEMBER (III-IV)	0.34	1.21	0.67	0.17	(0.23)

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a/ General purpose component of the UNV Special Voluntary Fund, excluding external costs component (the latter is notably to meet expenses such as assignment travel and resettlement allowance).